

Ms Victoria Pymm
Principal Council Officer
Legislative Council
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

DOC 08/22557

Dear Ms Pymm

Thank you for your letter dated 5 May 2008 following my appearance on Tuesday 29 April before the Standing Committee.

I am pleased to provide the attached advice in relation to the three questions directed to me that were taken on notice during the Hearing. In addition, I have provided answers to the written questions submitted prior to my appearance.

I have made a few minor corrections to the Hansard record for your consideration please.

I hope this material is useful to the Inquiry and if you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Fletcher
Deputy Director-General, Schools
May 2008

Inquiry into Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage

Questions on Notice

The Hon Dr John Kaye:

Mr Fletcher, could you point the Committee towards information that indicates where a school within the Murdi Paaki trial seen to be falling behind the targets set – I appreciate the explanation given of the targets – but where that happened what steps were taken? What the DET and other acronym organisations did to improve performance? Was that by investment or whatever? I do not think you have time to answer that now so I ask you to take that question on notice and I ask that you give it on a school by school basis as it relates to Murdi Paaki.

Answer:

Targets are set annually as part of the school planning and reporting cycle. Progress towards targets is monitored by School Education Directors as part of the Principal Annual Review process. At the commencement of the Murdi Paaki Trial, most schools were falling behind in at least one of the areas of literacy, numeracy, attendance and retention.

Schools are provided with a global budget to run programs to support the achievement of targets. Schools with substantial enrolments of students from low socio-economic backgrounds and some schools with significant Aboriginal student enrolments are provided with additional funding to support achievement of targets. Many of the schools in the Murdi Paaki area fall into this category. In addition, schools in remote locations are also able to access Commonwealth funding through the Country Areas Program to help support students to achieve targets.

Schools determine how to best use these additional funds, supported by School Education Directors and program consultants. Use of funds may include things such as the employment of additional specialist staff, professional learning or resources.

Regions develop specific programs to support schools to achieve targets. Schools in the Murdi Paaki region have been supported through the introduction of the Reading to Learn program and, more recently, Quicksmart mathematics program. Interagency programs such as Schools as Community Centres, Parents as Tutors and Kids Excel have been targeted to promote community engagement with schools and support the achievement of targets by promoting attendance and retention.

The attached spreadsheet provides information on the major funding programs, curriculum programs, interagency programs and leadership programs to support the achievement of targets in Murdi Paaki schools in 2006/07.

The Hon Trevor Khan:

Are you able to provide us with the past data and also your projections through to 2016?

Answer:

The information provided relates to the performance of:

- all students in government schools
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in government schools
- all students in schools receiving funding through the Priority Schools Program.

It relates to the percentage of students achieving below the 'Minimum Standard' and above the 'Proficiency Standard' in literacy and numeracy in Year 3, Year 5 and Year 7.

The data is contained in the attached document entitled 'Office of Schools Targets'.

Office of Schools Targets

Criteria for Setting Targets

- Office of School targets for all students have been determined in accordance with the following criteria set out in Priority S4 of the State Priority Delivery Plan:
Increasing levels of attainment for all students

Reduce the proportion of lowest performing students in literacy and numeracy by 10% by 2008 with a further 20% reduction by 2016

and

Increase the proportion of students meeting or exceeding national literacy and numeracy proficiency standards by 10% by 2012 with a further 5% increase by 2016.

- The literacy targets are based on the expanded literacy construct which includes reading, language and writing.
- The base year for these reductions is 2005.
- Minimum standard targets are expressed as the percentage below the standard. The minimum standards are defined as:
 - Year 3 literacy and numeracy: Band 1
 - Year 5 literacy and numeracy: Bands 1 and 2
 - Year 7 literacy and numeracy: Low
- Proficiency standards are expressed as the percentage above the standard. The proficiency standards are defined as:
 - Year 3 literacy and numeracy: Bands 4 and 5
 - Year 5 literacy and numeracy: Bands 5 and 6

Year 7 literacy and numeracy: Proficient and High

State Targets

Note: All percentages, including those for base years are presented to one decimal place. Consequently, targets may sometimes appear to be out by one decimal point.

Minimum standard targets for all students

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2016
Year 3 literacy	8.2	8.0	8.5	7.4	7.2	7.0	6.8	6.6	5.7
Year 3 numeracy	9.2	9.1	8.6	8.3	8.1	7.8	7.6	7.4	6.4
Year 5 literacy	5.9	6.1	5.0	5.3	5.2	5.0	4.9	4.7	4.1
Year 5 numeracy	6.6	5.4	6.5	5.9	5.8	5.6	5.4	5.3	4.6
Year 7 literacy	4.5	3.8	3.7	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.6	3.2
Year 7 numeracy	3.8	7.1	6.6	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.1	3.0	2.7
Factor *	1.0		0.933	0.90	0.875	0.85	0.825	0.8	0.7

Minimum standard targets for A&TSI students

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Year 3 literacy	28.0	25.2	24.8	24.6	19.4	17.3	15.1	13.0	10.8
Year 3 numeracy	25.5	22.9	24.9	22.3	17.8	15.9	14.0	12.0	10.1
Year 5 literacy	20.7	20.6	20.1	17.0	13.8	12.1	10.4	8.7	6.9
Year 5 numeracy	19.4	19.9	17.3	18.4	12.9	11.3	9.7	8.0	6.4
Year 7 literacy	14.6	15.7	13.1	12.4	9.6	8.3	7.0	5.8	4.5
Year 7 numeracy	13.9	12.5	21.3	20.1	9.3	8.1	6.9	5.8	4.6

Proficiency targets for all students

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2016
Year 3 literacy	42.2	41.6	46.8	44.0	44.6	45.2	45.8	46.4	48.5
Year 3 numeracy	46.1	45.4	45.9	48.1	48.7	49.4	50.1	50.7	53.0
Year 5 literacy	47.4	50.4	53.3	49.4	50.1	50.8	51.5	52.1	54.5
Year 5 numeracy	50.6	55.5	54.5	52.8	53.5	54.2	55.0	55.7	58.2
Year 7 literacy	82.9	83.8	84.0	86.5	87.6	88.8	90.0	91.2	95.3
Year 7 numeracy	64.9	63.0	62.6	67.7	68.6	69.5	70.5	71.4	74.6
Factor *	1.0		1.029	1.043	1.057	1.071	1.086	1.1	1.15

Proficiency targets for A&TSI students

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2016
Year 3 literacy	16.5	15.6	18.6	17.2	17.4	17.7	17.9	18.2	19.0
Year 3 numeracy	21.2	18.4	20.4	22.1	22.4	22.7	23.0	23.3	24.4
Year 5 literacy	18.4	19.2	21.8	19.2	19.5	19.7	20.0	20.3	21.2
Year 5 numeracy	21.5	23.3	22.8	22.4	22.7	23.1	23.4	23.7	24.8
Year 7 literacy	59.4	60.9	60.9	62.0	62.8	63.7	64.6	65.4	68.4
Year 7 numeracy	33.5	32.4	30.4	35.0	35.4	35.9	36.4	36.9	38.5
Factor *	1.0		1.029	1.043	1.057	1.071	1.086	1.1	1.15

The Hon Trevor Khan:

The measure will be introduced in the first term of 2008 in 400 kindergartens in schools across NSW to demonstrate the skills and knowledge that kindergarten children bring to school."

Mr Fletcher:

I believe you are referring to the Best start Initiative, which is what has happened. We have 400 schools involved in that initiative. It is not a test but a new assessment and is conducted of children in the first term of kindergarten.

The Hon Trevor Khan: Are you able to provide us with data about that?

Answer:

Announced in March 2007, Best Start is an \$81.6 million investment by the Government to be rolled out over four years, to support our youngest students in the early years of schooling.

Best Start has three components:

- a literacy and numeracy assessment for every Kindergarten student;
- the expansion of the highly successful Reading Recovery program; and
- the provision of time for expert leaders in literacy and numeracy in schools to further support the work of teachers.

Conducted early in the first term of the Kindergarten year, *Best Start* identifies the literacy and numeracy knowledge that each child brings to school as they enter Kindergarten. The *Best Start* assessment materials assess aspects of literacy and numeracy development that research shows are critical to successful learning. The way students are assessed and the materials used for the assessment tasks are consistent across the state.

The assessment tasks are presented to individual students by their classroom teacher. The literacy assessment tasks help the teacher assess each child's early reading and writing, understanding of how books work, and ability to recognise and use the sounds and letters of the English language. The numeracy assessment tasks are designed to assess students' early counting skills, and how they recognise and work with counting and number patterns.

Teachers use the student's responses to the tasks to find out what the student knows already in relation to these critical areas for early development. This analysis then gives the teacher the 'starting points' for planning classroom teaching and learning.

Teachers are supported with training in the use of the assessment materials and how to analyse the information to guide teaching.

The *Best Start Kindergarten Assessment* process also provides practical information for parents about how they can best support their child's learning and reinforce in the home what is being taught in the classroom.

In Term 1 2008:

- More than 70 regional officers participated in training to support implementation of *Kindergarten Assessment* process;
- More than 950 Kindergarten teachers, school leaders and support staff participated in professional learning on the assessment process; and
- More than 18 000 Kindergarten students were assessed.

The second component of the *Best Start* initiative is more Reading Recovery teachers.

Two hundred additional Reading Recovery teachers and eight additional regional based Reading Recovery tutors are to be provided over four years. By 2011 more than 10 000 students in 1 000 schools, supported by over 1 000 trained Reading Recovery teachers, will participate in Reading Recovery each year. The first 50 additional Reading Recovery teachers were allocated this year.

The *Best Start* initiative also provides the equivalent of 120 additional fulltime positions in schools, to be rolled out over the next five years, to support expert literacy and numeracy learning leaders. As part of their role these well respected and experienced teachers will support newly appointed teachers. They will build teacher capacity and expertise in the diagnosis of student literacy and numeracy learning needs; and the use of explicit literacy and numeracy teaching strategies.

Possible questions re COAG Murdi Paaki Trial

1. *Please outline for the Committee what each of your roles in the Murdi Paaki Trial entailed.*

My role as Deputy Director-General, Schools, NSW Department of Education and Training was to provide strategic policy direction to the Trial by co-chairing the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial Steering Committee with Wendy Jarvie, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and Sam Jeffries, Chairperson of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

I also provided leadership to Departmental staff and liaised with NSW government agencies as the Department was the lead agency for the NSW government in the Trial.

2. *In your opinion, what do you think have been the main lessons learnt (both positive and negative) as a result of the Murdi Paaki Trial?*

Effective partnerships are reliant on strong governance and leadership in communities and in government.

The Trial aimed to improve the Government's understanding of Aboriginal governance and how it affects the development and maintenance of partnerships, and to provide opportunities for Aboriginal leaders and communities to understand government policies and processes.

The *Evaluation of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial* was released in November 2006. Findings included:

- The (then) Department of Education, Science and Training and NSW Department of Education and Training demonstrated a strong commitment to the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial and to promoting positive change in government and communities.
- Both lead agencies have developed strong relationships in communities and have established a visible presence in the region.
- Among stakeholders familiar with the COAG Trials elsewhere in Australia, Murdi Paaki is regarded as the most advanced Trial site in terms of community capacity and governance.

As a result of their experience in the Trial, key stakeholders at a government and community level have identified the following critical factors for success in developing the partnerships needed:

- strong regional and community governance;
- Community Working Party and Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly participation in decision making at a state, regional and local level;
- Community Action Plans that are owned and actioned by the community;
- lead agencies that understand their role in whole of government arrangements and demonstrate leadership;
- engagement by partners agencies; and
- a localised Action Team.

Outcomes from the Trial included:

- Improving the way people connect with each other, learn from each other and work together develops better solutions to difficult problems.
- Murdi Paaki Trial partners and stakeholders used the power of relationships to bring about cultural shifts.
- Lead agencies tried to focus on success, on what could and needed to be done, rather than what could not be done.
- That the catalyst for change is the Aboriginal communities themselves, and that power and control must originate at that level.
- Community planning and community advocacy are important tools in the process and additional work is often needed to align these priorities with Departmental strategic plans.
- Local community governance mechanisms and processes must be developed to reflect local community views and are likely to differ across communities.

3. *Which do you think have been the most successful Shared Responsibility Agreements in Murdi Paaki and why?*

a) *Which do you think have been the least successful and why?*

The most successful Shared Responsibility Agreements were:

- those that addressed local priorities from Community Working Party action planning process and where responsibility and resources were shared between agencies and the community; and
- regional projects that delivered additional resources and funding to the region such as Community Facilitators, Secretariat Support, Air Cooling and Young Leaders Project.

The community and the region benefited from each Shared Responsibility Agreement signed.

The least successful Shared Responsibility Agreements were those developed to fund one off short-term projects with little engagement or community responsibility.

4. *How do you think Shared Responsibility Agreements could be improved?*

By moving towards Comprehensive Shared Responsibility Agreements where Community Working Party major priorities are addressed under a three to five year agreement and agency resources and programs acknowledge, build and sustain community engagement, responsibility and accountability.

5. *The NSW Government submission (pages 83-84) provides statistics of improvements within Murdi Paaki since the inception of the Trial, yet admits that direct causal links cannot be drawn between improved outcomes and Trial initiatives. Do you have any data that shows significant improvements in Murdi Paaki compared to the rest of the State?*

a) *In particular, do you have any information about improvements in participation, retention and attainment in schools?*

Benchmark and retention data:

- The percentage of Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki schools achieving national benchmarks has increased on all Year 3 and Year 5 indicators for literacy and numeracy.
- The percentage of Year 7 Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki schools achieving national benchmarks has increased slightly or remained stable for literacy indicators.
- For all indicators except Year 7 Reading and Year 7 Numeracy, the increase in the percentage of Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki schools achieving national benchmarks has been greater than for all students in Murdi Paaki schools.
- Apparent retention rates for Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki schools from Year 7 to 10 has increased from 67% in 2004 to 79% in 2007.
- Apparent retention rates for Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki schools from Year 7 to 12 has increased from 19% in 2004 to 25% in 2007

Growth of low performing students:

Literacy- Murdi Paaki Aboriginal students

- Year 3 – 2004 – 163 students in Band 1
- Year 5 - 2006 - 36 students in Band 1 (22%) and 64 students in Band 2 (41%)

Numeracy- Murdi Paaki Aboriginal students

- Year 3 – 2004 – 120 students in Band 1
- Year 5 - 2006 -27 students in Band 1 (23%) and 46 students in Band 2 (46%)

6. *Please provide details about the transition strategy that has come out of the Trial. Exactly which arrangements have been dropped, which are ongoing, and who now has responsibility for these arrangements?*

The Steering Committee endorsed a transition strategy for the Murdi Paaki Trial to normalise existing Murdi Paaki Trial processes in future arrangements and to ensure the continuity of engagement and participation by Murdi Paaki Aboriginal communities as key partners in decision making.

The lead agencies worked in partnership with the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Service and Indigenous Affairs to develop a transition strategy to ensure that effective arrangements were maintained and supported in the normalisation of services to Murdi Paaki communities through:

- Agreement between lead and partner agencies as major stakeholders to build on the lessons learnt through the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial and to commit their support to effective existing structures and processes.
- Regional implementation of *Two Ways Together* and *New arrangements in Indigenous Affairs* to strongly reflect existing effective partnerships developed between government and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and Community Working Parties.
- The (then) Department of Education, Science and Training and NSW Department of Education and Training to transition from COAG Trial lead agency role in December 2007. NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs to take on lead role for the NSW Government through *Two Ways Together* in Murdi Paaki region and Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to take on lead agency role for Australian government agencies.

Remaining processes and structures include:

- Agency representation at Community Working Party meetings.
- Regional Engagement Group and five sub groups to plan and develop whole of government responses at a regional and local level to meet targets in NSW State Plan.
- State and Australian government lead agency staff for Aboriginal affairs in the region.

Structures that have not been maintained:

- Secretariat Support for Community Working Parties (budgeted in unsigned Regional Partnership Agreement).
- Steering Committee (role aligned to Intergovernmental Group on Indigenous Affairs and Two Ways Together Coordinating Committee but neither of these

structures include a representative from the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly or deal specifically with the Murdi Paaki region).

7. *Can you tell us what the current status of negotiations is for the Regional Partnership Agreement? What will happen if the Commonwealth does not sign it?*

The Department is no longer involved in the negotiations for the Regional Partnership Agreement as the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs has taken up that role.

8. *Now that the Trial has ceased, do you think it is likely that the momentum built up from the Trial could be lost?*

The Department of Education and Training will continue to build upon the successes of the Murdi Paaki Trial by working with government and community to address regional and local priorities identified in community action plans. The Department will focus on its role in strengthening relationships between schools and communities to better engage Aboriginal parents and community members, teachers and executive staff and regional and agency staff in improving outcomes for Aboriginal students across Western NSW region schools.

The signing of a five-year Regional Partnership Agreement will facilitate engagement by the 16 Community Working Parties and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

Agencies will continue to work whole of government through the Regional Engagement Group to meet the NSW State Plan targets for Aboriginal people and the Australian government's *Closing the Gap* targets.

9. *The Dareton Aboriginal community submission (page 21) claims that its CWP does not represent the entire community, and that community members cannot challenge decisions made by the CWP. According to the submission, as government agencies now only liaise with CWPs, individuals and communities not directly represented on CWPs have become disempowered. Can you comment on this? Are there any plans to put future safeguards in place to ensure CWPs fairly represent everyone in the community?*

Government requested that each Community Working Party was transparent and representative of the community. Changes in membership for Community Working Parties have been publicised and are open to all members of the Aboriginal community. Changes have been undertaken by an officer or officers of the lead agencies and the Chair of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, if available.

Each Community Working Party developed a set of Terms of Reference and a Code of Conduct. Government provided funding to each Community Working Party through a Shared Responsibility Agreement for Secretariat Support, computer and internet access and training for Secretariat Support in Business Administration Certificate I, II and III. Minutes are taken at each Community Working Party meeting and are public documents.

Two Community Working Party Community governance workshops were held in each year of the Trial and Community Working Party Chairs met four times a year as the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

The Department is aware of the issues and has responded through attending Community Working Party meetings to address concerns and by working in partnership with the (then) Department of Education, Science and Training and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly to ensure that Community Working Parties are open, transparent, accountable and representative of the community.

Members of the Council of Australian Governments Trial Action Team attended the majority of Community Working Party meetings.

10. The Dharriwaa Elders (page 13) and Dareton Aboriginal community (page 21) submissions outlined discontent and frustration with a number of aspects of the Trial, including the internal appointment of Community Facilitators and CWP delegates (as opposed to democratically transparent elections), and a perceived failure of some Community Facilitators and CWPs to fulfil their duties.

Are there any plans to resolve such issues in future governance arrangements?

The NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet is the lead agency for the NSW government in the *Murdi Paaki Partnership Project*, which employs Community Facilitators for each of the 16 communities in the Murdi Paaki region.

The program is funded by the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

The recruitment process and appointment of the Community Facilitators was overseen by State and Australian Government officers at a senior level in the region. The program is monitored by a Steering Committee comprised of representatives from the funding agencies and the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

Facilitators are required to report monthly to their Reference Committees where membership is comprised of representatives from the Community Working Party, local business proprietors and Local Government. Community Facilitators are also required to report quarterly and these reports are collated and monitored by NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet and action is taken if required.

Plans to resolve such issues regarding Community Facilitators and Community Working Parties in future governance arrangements for the Murdi Paaki region need to be addressed to the funding agencies.